Dear Art, 10/3/72

When I phoned you yesterday an hour of a newsting remained. That should have thrown you into driving-home time out there, I presume one of heavier than usual preoccupation for you. I'd called at another inopportune time after getting and reading "The AP World" No. 3,1972 (which doesn't say how recent and doesn't contain an address). Your concluding comment was a question,"how about a hot-letter" from me.

Generally I have earned my reputation for such letters. What seems to have been lost upon those to whom I've sent copies is that whether my judgment was in any case correct, each was designed for a purpose that, at the time, I felt had a prospect of being accomplished. Some may well have been dominated by a passion like anger, but for the most part I believe I was fairly often right in feeling that a moderate letter would be ignored. Among these are a series to AP management at the time of the Gavzer-Woody pieces. If I do not and can't take credit for Gavzer's subsequent superior in the King case, he and Woody both attended a NYC press conference I had on the appearance of Oswald in New Orleans and neither wrote a nasty report. Neither, to the best of my knowledge, ever wrote a nasty thing on the subject thereafter, either. AP did have plans for getting that published as a book but that also didn't happen. So, I'm not at all reluctant.

However, with neither AP nor Bob Johnson do I feel it would do much if any good. If you feel otherwise, I'll agree with you. Because your note leaves unclear whether you want me to write the letter or prepare you, suppose I write something you can use and if you want me to write it, please get a sec. to retype on plain paper, with my return address, and send to the addressee you have in mind in my name. Or back to me for me to do it, dating it 3-4 days in advance.

A minor point I can't take time to check, I am pretty sure the well-known AP correspondent's name is Jack Bogall. Johnson consistently omits the "a". He covered the Hill when I worked there, I think. I know Jack Fischer, later with Harper's, did. Maybe Bogall was at State. Anyway, I know him. So, with this enormous and entirely unjustified self-praise, you might want to use this minor thing to deflate a bit if I'm right.

AP's supercaution is not new. When I did radio news we used their wire only. It was so ultra-cautious I aired the Ghandi assassination in Washington before anyone else. In fact, if it interests you to know a bit of my radio-news past, I'll tell you the rest of that story, briefly. I was a one-man news operation. I got to the station before the engineers and had our own copy ready for signon. The flash on Ghandi was about 5 minutes before newstime. I'd just given the announcer his copy when the bells rang. And we had one announcer, doing combo at that early hour. He wept when he read my first full newscast on it, by the way, and he read it cold. So, how does a one-man news staff do a job on an event almost as far away as one can be that winds up in all the trade press? Simple. We had an old National HRO all-wave receiver on the top floor. I phoned BBC and asked the frequencies and hours of their newscasts, wrote them down, monitored them all, and raised enough hell to interrupt symphonies when the live news warranted it. Twixt and tween I rewrote BBC's stuff. There came a point where I had a real go-round with the then chief announcer, then no more, later a "reporter" with Mutual, then with USIA, I think. Charles Warren. He didn't like the quality of the signal that came in from BBC and didn't have its quality improved by the improvised patchcord perhaps 100 feet long that I used to reach the control room/"news" studio. The signal was poor but readable. And what did he want to cut off? Nehru telling the people about the event within a very short while after it happened, a couple of hours, I guess. Anyway, the nets were as sterile as AP and it was a simple matter to air the best news that day. I don't remember how long it was after its flash that AP put the bulletin on the wire. Note the relevance in Johnson's whole fake structure in his false claim to beating UPI when AP didn't and couldn't, thanks to that whore Merriman Smith. Why pretend?

Outdated printer-press prejudice against electronic news reporting is typified by the semantics to which Bob Johnson resorts in his meretricious "Too Busy for Tears" (The AP World, NO. 3, 1972) to make a series of false claims for credit to AP/ in its coverage of the JFK assassination.

"This was the <u>first</u> word in <u>publishable</u> form that President Kennedy had been shot." The emphasis addresses the prejudice. It underlines what amounts to deliberate lying.

Johnson structures his piece to hide until after making his false house-organ claim that UPI really beat AP with the news. He uses this space to manufacture a fiction, the "publishable" nonsense.

What does he mean by "publishable"? Only the utterly unreal, that there was a paper with type-setting automatic from AP's wire and then just closing at 12:39 CST.

Radio and TV are not "publishers" of the news? Of course they are, except to the hidebound who are locked into their own pasts and prejudices. Most people, for better or for worse, get their news that way, as they did in 1963 and as they most assuredly do on that infamous November day when other reporters did bang-up jobs and wept as they did.

So, is there anyone capable of reading the news who couldn't ad lib the few missing words in UPI's staccato flash? Or any newsman who couldn't have aired, as I'm sure many did, before AP's wire came alive?

Johnson doesn't even contest that UPI's wire had "publishable" copy in his special definition five minutes before a word from AP. It said all that could then be said with responsibility, that shots had been fired at the President. It's later flash, timed the same minute as AP's first, says what AP then didn't, that the President was "seriously wounded", adding "perhaps fatally". So, where is this big scoop Johnson claims?

If there is no justifying the late Merriman Smiths conduct in violating all pool ethics to make it impossible for the others to file anything on that radiophone (AP wasn't the only victim), why pretend that it was possible to beat him? What is the need? Is it not better, really, to use all these futile words in an effort to see that there is never again such a violation of all ethics rather than in vainglory?

This childish ego drives Johnson to outright lies or confession of ignorance of the story he, personally, was responsible for at AP. He also claims to have made a later investigation, which makes the error, lie or ego, less excusable. He draws of Ike Altgen's pictures, "These were the only professional pictures made at the scene."

One might postulate that first-rate journalism lay in getting those infinitely more significant pictures not taken by "professionals". There were many.

This will undoubtedly be news to NBC, LIFE, who local TV stations, the local papers and others who undoubtedly consider their photographers "professional".

And,

The sad truth is that Bureau Chief Johnson of the inordinate ego doesn't know how many pictures his man made. It is more understandable that, when he turned his film in, the photographer himself forgot. There were many more than the three to which Altgens testified before the Warren Commission, the error repeated by Johnson.

All this vaunting hides the "unprofessionalism" of AP's losing the most important of Altgens negatives. It took a year of [my] prodding (by Harold Weisberg) before they actually located the original negative. This is one way of preserving historic journalism!

If AP filed more than report what it was told by official sources, cases do not come readily to mind. That it performed its day-to-day work competently would hardly seem to be the occasion for such ego-indulgence. Especially when so many of the world's best reporters were in Dallas and did do good work, did do what AP did not.

This is not a panegyric to UPI [whose service we use]. Merriman Smith somehow managed to snaffle the Pulitzer with an exotic combination of factual error and character flaw. No proud reporter can praise or condone Smith's work or behavior or the Pulitzer committee's judgement. My point is not partisan. It is professional. With Smith as with Johnson and AP. One doesn't revel in the minimal performance of his "professional" task.

That, however, is not restricted to the alleged subject of Johnson's piece. It includes this self-adulation, which has its own share of error. For example:

[Jack Beall's name is misspelled every one of the many times it is mentioned.]

"Oswald was quickly started to Parkland [Hospital]." False. He lay there bleeding to death while an ambulance was coming although there were police cars on the spot. He could have been at the hospital by the time the ambulance got there. One doctor testified it would have made no difference, that Oswald would have died had he been shot in the emergency

room. To so grossly misrepresent that "Oswald was quickly started" is bad reporting at best, contemporaneous or ex poste facto. Thus Johnson boasts of the contemporaneous reporting over which he presided that he and his people were "immersed" in what he describes as "the ceaseless checking and pursuit of detail." And they were represented on the spot.

Straw men he has, ~~too,~~ with pretense that there was "concern about the President's visit because Dallas was a racist city." No such thing, as he knew and knows. It was the extremists partly reported by him only and that nine years later. They did plan a ruckus, it was known to the police, who had infiltrated, there were arrests. In fact, there were demonstrations, too. Concern was over the attack on Adlai Stevenson, not ~~xxxx~~ unalleged "racism".

It is the traditional role of the press that it be watchdog over, not apologist for the government. This should apply to Johnson and the wire services as well as papers, magazines and the electronic media. Johnson becomes apologist for the government in his facile and untrue attempt to pretend that without foreign correspondents present there would not have been the belief there had been a conspiracy, which he melds with another and I think it not unkind or unfair to say unscrupulous attack on UPI. That graph reads:

There were other rumors that flourished after the assassination, mainly that there was more than one gunman. From our investigations at the time, we concluded that many of these rumors were started by foreign reporters unable to believe that an assassination could result from anything other than a political plot in the European tradition. A contributing factor could have been a UPI report that 'three gunshots of fire, apparently from automatic weapons, were heard'."

There is one thing completely professional about this graph: its dirtiness. I have added emphasis to illustrate what should have been obvious to whoever edited this cheap pug for AP - of the kind that should turn off its younger staffers.

They were not "rumors", they were reports, as legitimate as anything in the everyday life of every reporter. They didn't "flourish" and they were not "after the assassination". They were immediate, numerous and completely validated by the Secret Service and the FBI, as the files of the Warren Commission prove without possibility of doubt. That the Commission chose to ignore its own evidence is a other matter, but this is its evidence.

The kind of "investigation" AP Dallas conducted is in part illuminated by Johnson's continuing ignorance about the number of pictures of which he brags, taken by his own man. Had Johnson or anyone else at AP ever investigated one of these pictures alone, they have found reason to wonder if Oswald was, in fact, at the sixth-floor window and witnesses who told the FBI he was not. No witness ever placed him there, so there is at least reasonable doubt if one is not an official apologist pretending to be a dispassionate reporter.

Most of the eyewitnesses said shots came from other than the sixth-floor window. If eyewitnesses are not to be believed, then there is no contrary version, either. There were witnesses who said they saw ~~xxxxxx~~ the fatal shot strike from the front, the more reasonable of the possible interpretations of the existing "unprofessional" film that is in the official evidence. It is not a "rumor" that shots came from the front. It is an official rumor that they did not. More than enough eyewitnesses say one or more did. The official investigation was deficient in not addressing this and suppressing the evidence contrary to the official preconception. Johnson et al could not have conducted any "investigation" without finding quite a few such witnesses.

"Foreign reporters" did not and could not have "started" these "rumors". It is a deliberate and gross defamation to say or infer it. The Secret Service itself said the same thing, and this included the "automatic weapons". The inventory of local TV footage that is in the Commission's files, prepared by the Secret Service itself, contains this. The very report with which the Zapruder film was sent to Washington the night of the assassination quotes Zapruder, who was standing right there, as saying the shot came from the west, not the east. Regardless of where it or any shots did or did not come from, this is vile writing and a shameful attack on our foreign brethren.

It is compounded by the provincialism that pretends this is not a country of violence but European ones are. Political assassination are and have been more con on here than there or in any other pretendedly civilized nation. The more spectacular ones of subsequent years seem to have gone unnoted by Johnson.

The Warren Commission says there were three shots. Most people say more. So where is

UPI at fault in reporting the absolute minimum number of shots, identical with the number fixed upon by the Warren Commission? Perhaps Johnson has seized upon the word "gunbursts" instead of "gunshots". He is careful to quote incompletely, not giving the source, if UPI cited one. Suppose that source was the Secret Service, which could have said it and did use the description "automatic weapons", as did virtually all experienced hunters at the scene? Would this, then, be a legitimate criticism of UPI?

And if it were an unfortunate accident attributable to haste and emotion, how is it worse that Johnson's personal journalistic failing of which he boats so overweeningly, his personal misrepresentation of what Altgens really saw. All Johnson put in his bulletin was that "President Kennedy was shot". His mature journalistic judgement gave much more space to Mrs. Kennedy's alleged motions (inaccurately described by Johnson personally) and that magnificent tribute to perceptive journalism, her alleged exclamation, "Oh,no!"

Here we have it all put together, that "Oh, no!" as part of so truly sensatoonal a bulletin of two and a half dozen words only. That is the world-shaker or this perfection in nournalism.

Not what Altgens saw and reported seing, the harrifying spray of the Persident's brains in all directions and over a considerable area.

The President was only "shot" when an AP man saw his brains explode so sickendingly? And UPI, nat urally, is criticized and ridiculed for saying at the same instant more than it had already said, "Kennedy seriously perhaps fatally" wounded?

If Johnson was then "Too Busy for Tears", it is not too late now!

It is fitting to weep over such reporting of one of the great stories of all time. It is more fitting to weep over it now that to gloat about incompetence palmed off as superior performance.

It is disgraceful than nine years after the fact, without the grossest incompetence proven without doubt, that any reporter who lived through that tragedy would criticize another, UPI or unnamed "foreign".

The whole bit is shameful. That AP published it uncritically is another disgrace.

Johnson has reached the Peter-Principle position in the AP's hierarchy, newsman's general sports editor. This is not deprecation of sportswriters, who also serve and have their own respected and respectable roles in our craft. One would think that somewhere in all of AP there was a pro sportswriter who could have filled this slot. If this is a sample of Johnson's "professionalism", there is a reasonable inference that he crawled to New York and his present managerial post.

Neither his Dallas performance nor this despicable attack on every reporter there not (also AP an undisguised apology for officialdom) justify his promotion.

And if AP had had a less prejudiced view of electronic reporting and the share of the news audience it commands than Johnson reflects, it would have lost fewer accounts to UPI.

Sincerely,

Att, I've been interrupted a half-dozen times in the more than 24 hours it has taken me to type this. I hope you can understand from it that I haven't now time to read and correct it without delaying it longer. I hold a carbon. Do what you will or ask me to do whatever you'd like me to.

One of the things I've had to keep an eye on is the Watergate Whitewash. I seek no attention on it. However, some time ago Bill Malek (?) of KPFK (?) Pacifica asked me to do something on it by phone. I did. I regret I followed immediately after Paul Krassner and Mae Brussel, whose words I didn't hear. This imposed serious restraints upon me because I had to be careful not to appear to attack or criticize either. I have read her (first?) Realist piece and it is farout. I know that Krassner wrote that Johnson screwed JFK in the backwound on the plane, a gruesome joke that some people actually believed. Mae is dedicated and serious, but that doesn't keep her from jumping to conclusions she then believes to be and presents as facts. Anyway, if you know Malik and he wants to go further, if it is not too late at night, I'm willing. I have no special interest in it. But I have and have read the indictment and that can be a responsible show. Hastily, with best regards,